



Research Article

'BHOJPURI ART FORM 'BIDESIA': A PRELUDE'

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ABSTRACT

Bidesia Art form is mostly developed on the basis of Bhikhari Thakur's creative endeavour vis-a-vis Bhojpuri language. It is said that in Bhikhari Thakur's (1887- 1971) work, there is a specific style of subtle protest against the oppressive and corrupt system. It raises some questions in the viewer's minds, leaving them at liberty to be ashamed, silenced, shocked or to rise in protest against the Social ills that are well projected in the plays and songs of Bhikhari Thakur. In this paper, i have tried to demonstrate that the Socio-political realities shown through Bidesia art gain popularity not merely because they reflect Social ills inflicted upon the marginalized sections of society (especially women and Dalits) and are thus resistant towards the dominant norms but because his work resorts to the propagandist and entertainment spheres. They undertake a political motive but fall in the realm of cultural pleasure. Thakur, by making use of the Bidesia folk songs, folklore, proverbs and popular sayings of the Bhojpuri belt, successfully achieved this popularity. These became a good medium not only to create awareness but to also compose the cultural definition of this region. Along the same lines, i look at the case of Bhikhari Thakur and the literature produced by him to the formation of ' Bidesia Art Form'.

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INTRODUCTION

Bhikhari Thakur through his plays and songs portrays everyday life and social dimensions of Bhojpuri society between the period of the two world wars. He has beautifully done this through his unique cultural form called 'Bidesia' Begin "In this paper, I attempt to review the plays and songs of Bhikhari Thakur in the purview of sociology of literature. Locating this body of literature in the colonial paradigm, there is an attempt to delineate the social, cultural, economic and political characteristics of Bhojpuri society. It is during the first couple of decades of twentieth century when the plays and songs of Bhikhari Thakur gained enormous popularity. Thousands and thousands of people turned up to watch and enjoy his plays. There is an attempt to outline the spaces in the contemporary rural social structure where 'Bidesia' art fits in properly as a cultural form. Features of this rural social structure match and coincide with the subject matter of 'Bidesia' art. Moreover, these social attributes get represented by means of plays and songs of Bhikhari Thakur in general and 'Bidesia' art form in particular.

It seems hoary if we try to trace the genesis and convention of folk literature. One can link its origin to humanity. Local dialects have largely contributed in the maturation of languages. Bhojpuri, along the same lines helps in the sophistication of Hindi.

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It has reinforced the wide spread reception of Hindi as 'Rajbhasha'. Local dialects are in fact languages of indigenous masses. These dialects have strengthened larger languages e.g. Hindi. Local dialects are spoken by the indigenous people who mainly stay in villages. These dialects in general and Bhojpuri in particular is mostly spoken by the peasants and laborers. The production of folk literature also takes place in this local domain. G.B. Pant Institute of Social Sciences, Allahabad and few students of political science and philosophy departments of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi have carried out research and analysis of such folk literature. G.B. Pant Institute has done a major project on Bhikhari Thakur. Chandrasekhar and Gorakh Pandey were M. Phil and Ph. D. students in the departments of political science and philosophy at JNU respectively. Begin within the domain of sociology have endeavored this study on the plays and songs of Bhikhari Thakur in the sociology of literature. Bhikhari Thakur is considered the prime figure amongst several other writers of contemporary folk literature. This paper has been composed by contextualizing plays and songs of Bhikhari Thakur in it's socio-economic and historical background. His plays pictured the local social scenario in an unique fashion. Bhojpuri dialogues, props and dress used on stage enabled audiences to associate to the pain and misery depicted in the plays. Songs mainly narrated the story of hardships faced by the male characters who migrated to the core centers e.g. Kolkata in search of livelihood. This papers explores the aesthetics of the plays and songs in general and the style of Bhikhari Thakur's presentation in particular. Bhikhari Thakur's form of theatrical presentation became such famous that other drama companies

were also called 'Bidesia'. Bidesia has proved the most famous and popular play amongst a total 13 plays by Bhikhari Thakur. This immense popularity makes Bidesia a genre of Art in itself. This paper argues for Bidesia as a potential Art form. Analysis of Bhikhari Thakur's literature is definitely a very big challenge. Indeed, it becomes easier to write at length by situating the literary product in the contemporary social epoch.

Bidesia art reflects the system of various ideas on which the contemporary society was organised. Sometimes it conforms to the societal values and norms of the feudal, patriarchal society, especially in the plays Bidesia and Kalyug Prem, where there is an act that a woman should be chaste to her husband and take care of the family, household and children. Thus this art also keeps falling back to the same kind of false consciousness that it constantly tried to break away from.

Although, it is clear that Bidesia art is propagandising women's promiscuity. But at the same time it also fights for the freedom of women and their sexual rights in the play *Gabarghichor*. The other aspect of the play *Bidesia*, at the same time is that, in this play demonstrates about prostitution as a social problem. If we bring in the base and superstructure model here, then we can see that this kind of art is a result of the economic base. Since Bhikhari came from a backward caste family, he was too poor to lead his life in a normal way. The social and economic circumstances compelled him to migrate and earn his living (Singh, 2005). So, he had lived through all these miseries and exploitation caused by the dominant classes and produced a work, which in a way, are viewed against the contemporary social practices. Since all his plays directly talk about the dalits and the underclass. His theatre troop was also mainly comprised of dalits and lower caste people (Bhikhari Thakur Rachnavali). The names of the characters in this art form are also dalit and lower caste names. According to Macherey, literature and art support ideological communications. Bidesia art along the same line, has definitely provided some kind of ideological communication. The selling of daughters for wealth was considered to be a matter of low prestige and crime. The Government of India also banned child marriages during the same period (Singh, 2005). The subject matter of Bidesia art was influenced by the social practices and Thakur wanted others to become aware of their miseries. He can be seen as propagating a kind of consciousness among people through this art form which comes close to what Lukacs meant when he talked about socialist realism as a perfect form of creativity, where the writer gets first hand information, lives it, and produces authentic arguments.

Accordingly, a certain aesthetic organization of sense experience. Based on the above discussion, it can be said that Bidesia art made an impact in the field of the political through its performance. But there is no denying the fact that this art is primarily a form of entertainment. It falls mainly in the purview of culture and gets viewed primarily through aesthetic sense. Besides, it contained a system of ideas which some times conformed to the societal values and sometimes deviated from them.

Bidesia art form configures stages, demonstrates and rallies around notions of shared belief systems, ultimate values and common culture, as the mainstay of social order in the contemporary semi-feudal societies of eastern Uttar Pradesh and western part of Bihar. The element of political in Bidesia art form gets reflected in the way it successfully propagates

about the pains and sorrows of the common masses. This propagation gets articulated as a critique to dominant ideology that functions to incorporate common masses into the society of the ruling class, thereby maintaining social cohesion. Bidesia art form through Bhojpuri plays and songs can be seen resisting this very false consciousness offering a critique to the semi-feudal structure of the contemporary society and also the existing class relations plays and songs of Bidesia art form gain popularity primarily through their aesthetic qualities. Working within the domain of sociology of literature, my basic concern throughout this paper is to point out this simultaneous politico-cultural and aesthetic dimension of Bhojpuri 'Bidesia' art form. This assertion is collaborated through the very understanding of the terms politics and aesthetics forwarded in this paper. Politics according to Jacques Rancier (2005) is the struggle of an unrecognized party for an equal recognition in the established order. Politics, he argues itself is not the exercise of power or struggle for power. It is first of all the configuration of a space as political, the framing of a specific sphere of experience. The setting of objects posed as 'common' and of subjects to whom the capacity is recognized to designate these objects and discuss about them. Politics first is thus the conflict about the very existence of that sphere of experience. Moreover, aesthetics is bound up in this battle, because the battle takes over the image of society what it is permissible to say or show. Bidesia art form very well incorporates the above made argument. I use the term aesthetic here in a sense close to the Kantian idea of a priori forms of sensibility (Kant 1900). Referring to the concepts of time and space as logically necessary conditions for there to be an experience at all, thus I see 'Bidesia' form as both a matter of art and aesthetics and also fundamentally a matter of time and space. This is the manner in which it is possible to understand the political and cultural impulse in the aesthesis of 'Bidesia art form'. I argue that the 'Bidesia' art form in spite of being resistant to the dominant ideologies, fall within the realm of politics and culture and also gain popularity because they carry an aesthetic appeal. I accordingly restage the radical writing movement in Bhojpuri literature as an aesthetic movement, in which the practices of women, labor and the marginalized were framed primarily around the capacity to voice their experience. I try to articulate the paraphernalia of aesthetics politics and culture in Bhojpuri 'Bidesia' art form using pathos.

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